AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1.   (Currently amended) A method for paying a proper amount of postage comprising:

estimating a postage amount necessary to send a piece of mail;

prepaying for the estimated postage amount;

digitally signing the estimated postage amount, an addressee information, a

sender information, and a date;

printing the digital signature, the postage amount, the addressee information, the

sender information, and the date on a postage indicia in a bar code

format;

affixing to a mailpiece [[a]] the postage indicia comprising an indication, readable

by machine only, of the estimated postate amount;

mailing the mailpiece; and

paying an adjusted postage amount, subsequent to the mailing of the mailpiece,

in response to a bill.

2.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein prepaying the estimated postage amount comprises prepaying the estimated postage via the Internet.

3.   (Cancelled).

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4.   (Cancelled).

5.   (Currently amended) The method of claim [[4]] 1, wherein the bar code is a 2-dimensional bar code.

6.   (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising verifying that the postage indicia has not previously been used on a second mailpiece.

7.   (Currently amended) A method of adjusting an amount of prepaid postage on a mailpiece, wherein the mailpiece comprises a postage indicia including an indication of an initial postage amount, comprising:

receiving a payment for the initial postage amount;

receiving the mailpiece, wherein the postage indicia comprises includes the initial

postage amount, billing information of a sender, and a unique postage

number in only a machine readable format;

verifying that the initial postage amount is the proper amount;

updating a database to associate the billing information with the unique postage

number;

using the billing information to bill billing a party for an adjusted postage amount,

if the initial postage amount is not verified; and

altering the postage indicia to reflect the adjusted postage amount, once the

party has been billed for the adjusted amount.

8.   (Original) The method of claim 7, wherein the payment for initial postage amount is received via the Internet.

9.   (Cancelled).

10.   (Cancelled).

11.   (Currently amended) A system for preventing postage fraud comprising:

means for receiving an estimated postage amount necessary to send a parcel;

a printer for electronically prepaying the estimated postage amount;

[[mean]] means for outputting a postage indicia comprising a stealth postage for

the amount prepaid; and

means for electronically paying for an adjusted amount of postage subsequent to

the mailing of the mailpiece.

12.   (Original) The system of claim 11, wherein the means for electronically prepaying comprises an Internet payment service.

13.   (Original) The system of claim 11, further comprising a printer for printing the postage indicia.

14.   (Original) The system of claim 11, further comprising

a processor for encoding the stealth indicia by digitally signing a postage amount, an addressee information, a sender information, and a date.

15.   (Currently amended) The system of claim 14, wherein the ~~postage indicia~~ ~~machine readable format~~ is a bar code.

16.   (Original) The system of claim 15, wherein the bar code is a 2-dimensional bar code.

17.   (Original) The system of claim 11, further comprising means for verifying that the postage indicia has not previously been used on a second mailpiece.

18.   (Currently amended) A system for adjusting an amount of prepaid postage on a mailpiece, comprising:

means for receiving a payment for an initial postage amount;

means for receiving a mailpiece~~, comprising~~ including a postage indicia, wherein the postage indicia ~~comprises~~ includes the initial postage amount, billing information of a sender, and a unique postage number in only a machine readable format;

means for verifying that the initial postage amount is the proper amount;

means for updating a database to associate the billing information with the unique postage number;

means for billing a party for an adjusted postage amount, if the initial postage

amount is determined to be [[proper]] <u>improper</u>; and

means for altering the postage indicia to reflect the adjusted postage amount,

once the party has been billed for the adjusted amount.

19. (Original) The system of claim 18, wherein the payment for initial postage

amount is received via the Internet.

20. (Currently amended) A computer-implemented method for adjusting

postage on a mailpiece, comprising:

estimating an amount of postage necessary for a mailpiece;

transmitting payment information;

printing a postage label including a postage amount represented only in an

electronically readable format and a verification information allowing a

mailing system to subsequently adjust the ~~mailing~~ <u>postage</u> amount.

21. (Original) The computer implemented method of claim 20, further

comprising creating the postage label by producing a bar code containing a date, the

postage amount, an addressee information, a sender information, and a digital

signature.

22. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 21, wherein bar code

further comprises a number unique to the postage indicia.

23. (Original) The computer implemented method of claim 21, wherein the bar code is a two dimensional bar code.

24. (Original) A computer-readable medium containing instructions for implementing a method for adjusting postage on a mailpiece, the method comprising:

estimating a postage amount necessary for a mailpiece;

transmitting payment information;

printing a postage label including a postage amount represented only in an electronically readable format and a verification information allowing a mailing system to subsequently adjust the mailing amount.

25. (Original) The computer-readable medium of claim 24, further comprising creating the postage label by producing a bar code containing a date, the postage amount, an addressee information, a sender information, and a digital signature.

26. (Original) The computer-readable medium of claim 25, wherein bar code further comprises a number unique to the postage indicia.

27. (Original) The computer-readable medium of claim 25, wherein the bar code is a two dimensional bar code.

28. (Currently amended) A system for preventing postage fraud comprising:

a mailpiece including a stealth postage indicia comprising a unique parcel

number and a unique postage number;

a scanner for reading the unique parcel number and the unique postage number;

[[and]]

a database in communication with the scanner, for verifying that the unique

parcel number and the unique postage number are assigned to each

other[[.]]; and

an electronic interface for transmitting the postage indicia to a user, wherein the

electronic interface is in communication with the database such that, upon

purchase of the postage indicia by the sender, the database is updated

with a record for the new postage indicia.

29. (Cancelled).

30. (Currently amended) The system of claim [[29]] 28, wherein the electronic interface is the Internet.

31. (Original) The system of claim 28, wherein the database further verifies that the unique postage number has not been used on a second mailpiece.

32. (Cancelled).

33.   (Currently amended) The system of claim [[29]] 28, wherein the unique parcel number and postage number are compared to an parcel number and postage number retrieved from a new mail parcel that enters a shipper's system.

34.   (Currently amended) The system of claim [[29]] 28, wherein the database is further updated with a new record for a new parcel scanned in by the scanner, wherein the new record comprises a unique parcel number and a unique postage number.

35.   (Currently amended) The system of claim [[29]] 28, wherein the scanner is a portable scanner.

36.   (Currently amended) A system for verifying the proper postage on a mailpiece, comprising:

    a mailpiece including a stealth postage indicia comprising a postage amount represented in a format not readable by humans;

    a scanner for reading the postage amount;

    a scale for weighing the mailpiece and determining the proper postage for the mailpiece; and

    a billing interface in communication with the scanner and the scale for verifying that the postage paid is the proper amount, and, if not, transmitting a bill to a sender of the mailpiece for an adjusted amount and receiving payment for [[an]] the adjusted amount.

37. (Original) The system of claim 36, further comprising an electronic interface for transmitting the stealth indicia to a user, and for receiving payment for the postage from the user.

38. (Original) The system of claim 37, wherein the electronic interface is the Internet.

39. (Original) A method of coding an amount of postage onto a mailing label whereby the postage amount can be read only by machine, and wherein the coded postage amount can be adjusted by the shipper system after acceptance of the mailpiece from the sender.

40. (Original) The method of claim 39, wherein the postage amount is represented in a bar code.

41. (Original) The method of claim 39, wherein the mailing label further comprises at least two unique numbers for preventing the unauthorized use of the postage label.

42. (Original) A method of dispensing fraud protected postage via the internet, comprising:

receiving an estimated weight for a parcel from a sender via a web page;

receiving payment from the sender for an initial postage amount for the parcel;

transmitting instructions to a user's computer for producing a stealth postage

indicia, comprising at least two unique numbers, and wherein the stealth

postage indicia represents the postage in only a machine readable form;

and

verifying a postage label for a mailpiece by verifying the two unique numbers.

43. (Original) The method of claim 42, further comprising verifying that the initial

postage was the correct amount.

44. (Original) The method of claim 43, further comprising billing the sender for

an adjusted amount if the initial postage amount was not correct.